DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 060 989 RC 006 024

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TITLE Deviant Behavior in the Mexican American Student and Its Relation to Education. A Position Paper.
SPONS AGENCY Southwestern Cooperative Educational Lab., Albuquerque, N. Mex.
PUB DATE Aug 70
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Bibliographic Citations; Cognitive Development; Literature Reviews; *Mental Health; *Mexican Americans; Personality; Research Design; *Research Needs; *Socioeconomic Influences

ABSTRACT

Several studies have been done about Mexican Americans but, in the area of their mental health, "a scant dozen articles are worth reviewing." Since the literature has been consistent in reflecting that a low socioeconomic level combined with extensive use of Spanish lowers IQ test scores of Mexican Americans, these factors should be studied in connection with the educational achievement of Mexican Americans and their mental health (i.e., in terms of such personality types as obsessive-compulsive, impulsive, schizophrenic, passive-dependent, and depressive). This could be done because Mexican Americans are highly distinguishable from other ethnic groups and are set apart by such factors as low median family income, speaking Spanish as a first language, a behavior and value system reflecting another culture, and a tendency to live in barrios. In such a study, 8 hypotheses are proposed for testing on a random sample of large numbers of Mexican Americans from all socioeconomic levels and ages, from every state in the Southwest, from rural and urban settings, from the Chicano militant element, from colleges, and from the Hispano component. The actual survey should be done by special questionnaire and a short adapted form of standard personality tests with some in Spanish. Examiners should be Mexican Americans highly trained in psychiatric interviewing procedures. In summary, this investigation should be a broad-based study on the mental health and educational achievement of Mexican Americans. (NQ)

ED 060989

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DEVIANT BEHAVIOR IN THE MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENT AND ITS RELATION TO EDUCATION

A Position Paper

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Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory
Albuquerque, New Mexico
August, 1970

RC006024

POSITION PAPER ON RESEARCH ON THE MEXICAN AMERICAN
SWCEL, ALBUQUERQUE
by Edward J. Casavantes

TENTATIVE TITLE:

DEVIANT BEHAVIOR IN THE MEXICAN AMERICAN
AND ITS RELATION TO EDUCATION

I. Introduction

Much recent research--in areas other than the immediate one of mental hygiene factors, it must be quickly added--has documented that a great number of the "attributes" of the Mexican American are essentially those attributes more appropriately associated with individuals who are members of the lowest socio-economic classes. A descriptive monograph by the present author represents a synthesis of papers by others whose work is of a more technical nature (Cohan and Hodges, Tulkin, Coleman, Mayesky). In formal statistical terms, these authors have found that most of these so-called attributes or characteristics of Mexican Americans are not validly "Mexican" attributes, but that the largest of the variance estimates relative to these attributes is accounted for by the low socio-economic positions of the majority of these people.

Among the variegated subject matter content with which these various authors deal are attitudes, mental retardation, intelligence tests, school achievement, and behavioral and life styles.

More to the present point, a reasonably exhaustive search for articles dealing with the specific area of the mental health of the Mexican American yields a scant dozen articles worth reviewing. These articles do not seem to have any one particular focus, and without question, they are not at all comprehensive in nature, in the same sense that they do not employ a truly representative sample as a study group. All involve a relatively small

number of subjects, and there is little if any attempt to deal, in their totality, with what could turn out to be some of the most significant variables, such as demography, religion, language, and social class.

In view of the fact that several studies (Mercer, Mayesky, Schwartz) have noted that the two main factors that differentiate the Mexican American from most other ethnic/racial groups are social class and the Spanish language, it is remarkable that no investigator to date has addressed himself to these two central concerns relative to the special area of mental health.

There are three major areas that may be studied with regard to the specific assignment to which this paper addresses itself:

Deviant Behavior and its Relation to Education.

(a) The relationship between defective cognitive development of Mexican American youth and cognitive functioning in education;

(b) The relationship between disturbed motivational factors of Mexican American youth and educational achievement;

(c) The relationship between overt deviant behavior of Mexican American youth and educational achievement.

(d) The relationship between the unique family pathology of the Mexican American youth and educational achievement.

It is clear that there are tacit assumptions implied: (a) That a Mexican American youngster's abnormal development (resulting in deviant behavior) will differentially effect his performance in school. Implied within the above assumption is: (b) That a certain number of Mexican American youth will be emotionally disturbed to a degree that their educational performance or school behavior will be differentially and significantly affected.

Obviously to find out with some degree of definitiveness the final answer to the questions posed above would require a very large research

effort. This paper will not attempt to be as comprehensive as it might wish, but will try to direct some of its attention to certain factors which may reveal partial answers to a limited (but broadly-conceived) number of hypotheses relative to mental hygiene factors and educational achievement among Mexican American youngsters.

This proposal is complicated by a most unique factor. In the review of the literature, not a single paper has addressed itself to the issue of the mental hygiene of the Mexican American and his education. Therefore, the studies cited will at times appear (and be) irrelevant.

To give a perspective as to the paucity of data in the general area of psychologic studies involving Mexican Americans, the writer perused the last two years' psychology research from citations in "Psychology Abstracts," a journal that simply catalogues the research performed in the previous year. In the two years of 1968 and 1969, Psych Abstract lists some 35,000 titles. Of these, only 12 items were listed under the rubric "Mexican American." This omission is even more glaring when the current emphasis on cultural understanding and ethnic understanding is considered.

Second only to the Negro, as a minority group; the Mexican American represents some six to six and one half million people. Clearly the Negro has received a far larger proportion of the scholar's attention. This is not to say that the Negro does not deserve increased attention, for he does. This is only to point out that by contrast, the Mexican American population, which amounts to better than one-fourth of the black population, is receiving nowhere near one quarter of the funding for programs and research that the black has recently come to enjoy.

II. Rationale for Proposed Study

The Mexican American is undeniably highly distinguishable from the so-called WASP: White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and with a middle-class orientation implied. Traditionally, this WASP has felt that all people living in America should have the same cultural, value, and behavior standards that he has (Gillin). His rationale for this has been variations of the "Melting Pot" theme, in which people from other lands come to the United States and, as quickly as possible, become reasonably standard WASPs. The teacher is no exception to this and consciously perceives what pupils of all cultural backgrounds should be, "like herself" (Carter, Casavantes, and Fowler). That this process is well-nigh impossible is, of course, evident to any sophisticated social observer. Nevertheless, the demand on the immigrant or on the culturally different to "assimilate" persists with unbelievable tenacity. The penalty for not becoming "Anglicized" is to bear the brunt, in some form or other, of prejudice or discrimination.

The Mexican American is, as stated above, highly distinguishable, and for a variety of reasons. It is instructive to note what some of these differences are, for quite often as a direct consequence of these, the Mexican American finds that he is discriminated against. Among the factors that set the Mexican American apart from the dominant Anglo society are:

1. He is not, in the main, a middle-class citizen, with a family income (in 1968) of close to $4,000, in contrast to the Anglo's median income of $7,500.

2. For his first language, he may speak Spanish, and thus the English he speaks is often laced with a noticeable accent.

3. His behavior and value system reflect another culture, with customs

that may vary from those of the dominant culture.

4. Has dark skin coloration, black hair, brown eyes, which gives him high visibility.

5. A very high proportion belongs to the Catholic Church (perhaps 95-97%).

6. The fertility rate is higher, with the average woman being the mother of some two to three children (the average Anglo mother has 1.4 children). (Grebler, Moore)

7. Has a tendency to concentrate in the five Southwestern states, and within those states, to have pockets--called barrios--that are mostly populated by Mexican Americans.

III. The Relationship Between Mexican American and Behavior Disorders.

The pervasiveness of so many important socio-cultural differences from birth is bound to affect the personality make-up of the individuals who develop within it. While these different personality configurations may be neither gross (i.e., readily observable), nor pathologic in and of themselves, they may generate in their wake certain behavioral styles or characteristics that may differ from those of the dominant culture. For example, from the psychiatric literature, (although not necessarily applying to Mexican Americans), there are observations that suggest that certain gross personality types regularly have specific cognitive styles that accompany them. Although there is never a one-to-one relationship, the following personality types more often than not are accompanied by the attending cognitive styles:

1. Obsessive-compulsive personality: Usually tends to become involved in pedantic detail, and to have some preference for numbers, or for similar

kinds of precision. (Wolberg)

2. Schizophrenic personality: Several studies have demonstrated that this personality has a reduced ability to think in or handle abstract concepts. (Meadow)

3. Impulsive personality: This type of person appears to have a short attention span, making long and tedious intellectual work almost impossible, preferring instead a wide and superficial array of diversions. (Scientific American)

4. Passive-dependent personality: This type of individual is often quite able to have much patience with his work, even if the work is boring, and may continue on a single line of work for extended periods of time.

5. Depressive personality: A depressed person is often characterized by his inability to mentally concentrate on things external to himself and his personal problems, and to have lowered energy level, thus lowered output.

6. Personalities from low socioeconomic levels: For reasons probably quite different from those of the schizophrenic, the child from a poverty setting has been known to have lowered ability to think and to conceptualize in abstract terms (Ziegler, Jensen).

7. Deprived personalities: Children who have been deprived of maternal nurturence demonstrate a combination of many of the above cognitive traits, including loss of ability to concentrate, lessened ability to abstract, lessened verbal behavior (Bowlby, Berelson and Steiner, Bereiter and Engelmann).

Because low socio-economic status, of itself, brings in its wake a host of aberrrations often perceived as "deviant," (i.e., mental retardation

sociopathy, psychosis, loss of certain cognitive behaviors), it will be given considerable attention. Also, it appears to be the only variable on which there is some research.

One of the most thoroughly documented facts of social science is that with the lowering of social class, scores on IQ tests drop. The literature is quite consistent: The very highest SES levels generally yield IQ scores between 110 and 115. It is very important to note that there seems to be a "ceiling" on the upper limit at about 115 IQ. Similarly, there seems to be a high consistency of test scores of large populations, which generally have their mean at the standardized mean of 100, with differences, if any, ranging from about 98 to 104. The lowest SES children <u>regularly</u> score at from about 82 to about 90 IQ. One of the main causes of the wider differences seems to be the prevalence of a language other than English. For example, Spanish-speaking youngsters score from about 80 to 85, while Indian youngsters score even lower at times. Susan Gordon, in unpublished research, has shown an interaction between the lowest SES and the tendency to <u>not</u> have knowledge of English. That is, lack of knowledge of English appears most evident in those settings where the SES is the lowest. Above this lowest SES, inability to handle English seems considerably less pervasive.

Combining the areas of language development and social class, Mercer has been able to document that the Mexican American child who has been placed in a class for the mentally retarded has had his scores depressed by a combination of a total of five variables, four of which are essentially tied to very low SES, and the fifth to the extensive use of the Spanish language. One may wish to conjecture at this point, combining the data from Gordon and Mercer, that the extensive use of Spanish in the home, or the use of Spanish only in the home, may be associated with lowered test

scores only when the exclusive or almost exclusive use of Spanish is also associated with the lowest SES.

Unusual stress was made with regard to low SES because of its effect on cognitive factors. It is also well-known that there appears to be an excess of two major mental diseases in the lower class. One researcher found that schizophrenia existed some 10 times as frequently among those whose income was less than $4,000 than those whose income was $6,000 and over. (Passamick, et. al., in "Mental Health of the Poor.") Sociopathic personalities appear more prevalent (especially among men) in depressed areas. (See Leighton, et. al., "The Character of Danger.") It is clear that the importance of these preliminary facts are relevant to the Mexican American, for the proportion of Mexican Americans living in sub-standard socio-economic settings is at least twice that of the Anglo.

Thus, the inference may be made that, to the degree that special psychopathologies exist in depressed areas, there will be specific scholastic difficulties for the Mexican American student in direct proportion to the nature of the psychopathology in question. If sociopaths are more prevalent in low SES areas, then the mental (i.e., cognitive) characteristics of this type of person should exist in excess in the schools. If schizophrenia is characteristic of certain barrios, then in those barrios the children must evidence the mental characteristics of schizophrenics.

These are only preliminary observations. The most basic hypothesis to which we must address ourselves is as follows:

> What unique and idiosynchratic (possibly deviant) behavioral characteristics, aside from those associated with low SES, are characteristics of the Mexican American population, especially the younger Mexican American population.

An ancillary hypothesis follows from the first:

What unique and idiosynchratic (possibly deviant) behavioral characteristics, aside from those associated with low SES, are being evidenced in the school setting by Mexican American youth.

At this point, the search must turn to those behavioral (psychiatric) characteristics that are uniquely "Mexican" or "Mexican American."

As stated before, there appears to be no literature which addresses itself to the unique problems of psychiatric conditions (i.e., deviant behavior) as these relate to the problem of the Mexican American student. However, a bibliography of these is included for reference purposes. It is worth noting that three names, Karno, Meadow and Mason, appear on almost 50% of the available psychiatric literature on the Mexican American.

IV. Hypotheses and Recommendations for Research

It is clear that for all practical purposes, no conclusions can be reached if there are, literally, no items of literature which bear directly on the effect of poor mental health on the educational performance of the Mexican American student. The present author, on both a scientific and philosophic basis, does not feel that extrapolating from studies of Anglos to poor school performance is appropriate. It is exactly this type of "extrapolating" that is trying to be reversed with these series of proposals relative to the uniqueness of the Mexican American.

Consequently, it is also clear that there must arise a series of new studies relative to the Mexican American's and his mental health, as these may affect his education.

The three major hypotheses that need to be tested initially are as follows:

Ho: Does the Mexican American--under differing social and demographic circumstances--evidence increased tendency to mental disorder as the index of socio-economic class goes down?

Ho: Does the lowering of social class of Mexican Americans bring in its wake a concomitant (possibly linear) increase in stress and stress syndromes, some of which may manifest themselves in differential psychopathologies.

Ho: Is there a differential distribution of psychopathologies among the Mexican American people, as compared to other groups, such as Anglo, Indian, black, when these groups are socio-culturally-demographically equated?

Ho: Do Mexican Americans evidence differential symptoms when they are suffering from specified psychopathologies? (Examples: do Mexican Americans have different hallucinatory experiences, or do their hallucinations have a special "flavor" when they are diagnosed as schizophrenic? Or, when a Mexican American has been essentially correctly diagnosed as a sociopath, will he be more likely to engage in certain kinds of activities at the expense of other activities found more frequently in Anglos, or in Indians, or blacks?)

The answers to these initial four questions will, in a sense, decide what other hypothesis to test. However, it is possible to anticipate some of these additional broader questions at this time. Consequently, the following hypotheses will also be proposed as suitable for testing:

Ho: Do specific psychopathologies which are unique to the Mexican American appear to affect his school performance to a degree that is significantly different from other ethnic groups similarly situated? (A quantitative analysis)

Ho: In what specific way or ways do specific psychopathologies in Mexican Americans differentially affect specific academic areas of endeavor? (A qualitative analysis)

Ho: Are specific psychopathologies of Mexican American students involved in certain behavioral manifestations usually labeled "difficulties with the school and its administrators?"

Ho: Is it possible to trace certain psychopathologic patterns of Mexican Americans to known patterns or discrimination and prejudice from the dominant (Anglo) society?

V. Methodology

In general, the method of approaching this type of problem is to define the population, and then sample or survey it. In our case, a very careful random sample of Mexican Americans from all socio-economic levels, all ages,

from every state in the Southwest (and perhaps from "pockets" of Chicanos, such as in the Chicago area, Muncie, Indiana, Michigan, etc.), from rural and urban settings, and from known groups who perceive themselves as somewhat different from the "mainstream of Mexican Americans." Specifically, I believe that three special such groups as the Chicano militant element, college students, and the Hispano of Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado should be sampled.

The actual survey must be made from specially designed questionnaires using as a base or model other instruments (such as those used in the Manhattan Study), and adapting these. I would also like to see standardized (but perhaps short-form) tests of personality, such as the Minnesota Counseling Inventory and/or the California Personality Inventory. Some of these should be in Spanish. Basically, then, I propose a very broad-based questionnaire to be administered by (if at all possible Mexican American) examiners that have been highly trained in the principles of interviewing, preferably psychiatric interviewing.

The present design does not anticipate going into mental hospitals where Mexican Americans are already housed as patients. The diagnostic, cultural, and administrative system utilized during the various phases of the commitment procedures may have over-selected and possibly under-selected a disproportionate number of Mexican Americans into mental hospitals. However, this area is open to further discussion and adaptation.

VI. Summary

In view of the fact that there is almost no really adequate research of the total Mexican American population relative to its mental health, no adequate conclusions can be drawn. Relative to the school, there is

no research on mental health correlates.

This proposal suggests a broad-based study of a completely random sample of Mexican Americans, but in sufficiently large numbers that highly sophisticated computer analysis can be carried out. (Technically, the point here is that there must be a large initial sample so that, when various units are broken down, there will still be high number of N in each cell for reliable analysis.)

The actual survey will be done by questionnaire, and possibly by shortened and adapted forms of standard personality tests. It was recommended that the examiners be Mexican Americans who have been highly trained in psychiatric interviewing procedures.

VII. Am I or My Agency Interested in Being Included?:

The U. S. Commission on Civil Rights has as its mandate to carry out investigations and studies which have been originated from within. Thus, although it is technically able to carry out such an investigation, it is not likely that it would.

Personally, I would very much like to be associated with this type of project. My personal professional predilections are this type of work. However, I would not be able to carry out this project as an individual, and would require the back-up systems usually associated with an institution. Under the auspices of an institution, I would very much like to be involved with this project.

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